Review/**Television**

In China, Softening the Hard Line

By WALTER GOODMAN

The television producer Irv Drasnin and his film crew spent seven weeks in China last winter, trying, under the eye of an official escort, to find out what has been happening since the Government crackdown on political dissent in June 1989. Tonight's enterprising report, "China After Tiananmen," at 8 on Channels 13 and 49, focuses on the confrontation between political orthodoxy and economic innovation.

The freshest material comes in interviews with a new generation of entrepreneurs: a 29-year-old Xian man who runs a school for fashion models, the manager of a computer company in China's silicon valley, the owner of a high-fashion store in Beijing, the head of a private company in a special economic zone on China's southern coast, a trainer of Avon saleswomen in Guangzhou, which is also known as Canton. Everywhere Mr. Drasnin finds a vigorous commercial spirit, tolerated and even encouraged by the state because it seems to be working.

Frontline
China After Tiananmen

Written and produced by Irv Drasnin. Andrew J. Andreasen, associate producer; Michael Sullivan and Martin Smith, senior producers; David Fanning, executive producer. A Drasnin Production in association with Frontline. At 8 tonight on Channels 13 and 49.

At the same time, Communist party officials continue to talk tough. "When we open the window of reform, some flies and mosquitoes may come in," one says. "And when they do, we'll take measures to control them. We'll just kill the flies and mosquitoes. So we can resist the invasion of decadent influences like bourgeois ideas and life styles."

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But the message of this cogent and colorful 90 minutes is that wherever state enterprise competes with private enterprise, the state loses, and what officials condemn as "bourgeois liberalization" is already rampant. Even as the authorities are trying to refurbish the cult of Chairman Mao, religion and rock music are attracting their own cults; crime and drug use seem to be increasing and soft porn can be found on newsstands. Madonna's records are sellouts, and a student at a prestigious Beijing high school says his heroes are Zhou Enlai and Michael Jordan, and he seems more enthusiastic about the basketball star.

If the interviews here are at all representative, ideology is out of fashion among young men and women looking for higher paying jobs and the goods that go with them. The home of what Mr. Drasnin calls a suburban peasant, a member of a new class in the Chinese countryside, displays all manner of creature comforts. Even such Government institutions as the People's Liberation Army are investing in private businesses. Mr. Drasnin says, "Payment and earning power: that's what most Chinese are thinking about."

Although such assertions may go beyond his evidence, the program is persuasive about the tension between economic freedom and political control. The four cardinal principles of Chinese Communism still celebrated by the leadership — the supremacy of the Communist Party, the primacy of Marxism-Leninism and the thought of Mao, socialism and dictatorship of the proletariat — are not easily reconciled with what the new entrepreneurs call their four autonomous rights. One businessman defines them: "We recruit our own personnel; we manage our own business; we're responsible for our profits and losses, and we raise our own funds." Marxism with a capitalist face?

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The program ends with those unforgettable pictures of the pro-democracy demonstrators and the uprising in Tiananmen Square. For now, the young seem to be choosing the promise of economic opportunity over the perils of political dissent. But the record of Communism in Europe suggests that freedom is not easy to compartmentalize, and, on this third anniversary of the Tiananmen crackdown, viewers are left with unsettling reminders of how far the regime in Beijing has already shown itself willing to go to hold onto power.

AP/Wide World

Three years after students held pro-democracy demonstrations in Tiananmen Square, public television examines what has happened since the crackdown in a report at 8 tonight on Channels 13 and 49.

TIANANMEN SQUARE AFTERMATH: Chinese soldiers secure the area following the 1989 massacre.

East greets West in China

'Frontline' eyes changes in 3 years since Tiananmen

TO PARAPHRASE an old song, those hard-line Communists are having a hard time keeping the young people down on the farm after Tiananmen Square. China may not be "Paree," but watching young, thin models being taught to walk down a fashion runway, as in tonight's enlightening PBS "Frontline" documentary, "China After Tiananmen," one could be fooled (Ch. 13, 8 p.m.).

There are still limits on free expression, according to producer Irv Drasnin, "but also on the state's ability to suppress it." A performing rock group echoes the sentiments of the people when it sings "What's the '90s Gonna Bring?"

KAY GARDELLA

Drasnin, one of the first documentary makers allowed to film semi-freely after the June 4, 1989, student uprising (he wasn't allowed on university campuses), sees signs of unrest, uncertainty, and conflicting realities. Obvious economic changes have occurred, and private enterprise appears to be the wave of the future. The school for fashion models, for instance, is one example. Another is training sessions for Avon saleswomen.

The Central School for Communist Party Cadres, where successors are being trained to replace the aging Communist leaders (Deng Xiaoping, China's current leader, is 87), is as close as the program gets to the government.

According to Drasnin, the events in Tiananmen, seen by the West as a "popular outcry," were viewed by government officials as a "conspiracy of counterrevolutionaries."

China has the kind of demographics American advertisers and networks would love — two-thirds of the population is under 35. So one is not too surprised that students are being influenced by the West. When one young man is asked who his heroes are, he replies, "Zhou En-Lai and Michael Jordan." Another young man, a college graduate, reflecting the confused outlook of the young people, tells Drasnin he has taken the name Kafka "because we are in the same situation. We cannot live in truth. No one really understands me."

Actor Gu Yue is interviewed, and with his front hair shaved back, he's the image of Mao Zedong, the man he's portraying. The film he's in deals with Mao's early years as leader of the popular cause.

A change in movie-making has taken place, Drasnin notes. Film makers, who before the uprising were making movies about problems of reform, are now putting forth the guidelines of the state. Others have left China.

State-run enterprises are in jeopardy as private business has become the fastest-growing sector of the Chinese economy. As government researcher Du Yan comments: "I, personally, don't think it's reached the point where they can be saved."

A marketplace, once 90% state-owned, is shown with all its thriving private butcher shops and other stores. "Payment and earning power, that's what most Chinese are thinking about," says Drasnin. "The entrepreneurial spirit is everywhere."

Still, China's jobless number in the tens of millions. And there are still the hard-liners, the true believers, like the Minister of Culture, who says: "What has taken place in the Soviet Union will not happen in our country."

Something is happening, as the 90-minute report shows. China is at a crossroads.

TONIGHT, TOO, I recommend another edition of Bill Moyers' PBS series, "Politics, People and Pollution" (Ch. 13, 9:30). In short, the report details how big companies, like a chemical plant in Louisiana, that are polluting the air we breathe have political clout and get big tax breaks, while their victims get cancer.

human Thicke. Adam Philipson, Rosa Nevin and Betsy Palmer costar.

Though the special effects have improved, the most striking aspect of the sequel is its visual impact. It's more eye-burstingly bright and colorful than anything this side of a laundry commercial—a perfect complement to the channel's bleachy-clean approach to programming. That vividness, though, is entirely missing from the hackneyed script. For Thicke, this is the role of a lifetime: The Canadian actor plays a robot with remarkable conviction. Grade: C

©DISNEY

◄ STILL NOT QUITE HUMAN
Lab rats Jay Underwood and Alan Thicke, trying to display artificial intelligence in this comedy sequel

CHINA AFTER TIANANMEN

PBS (Tues., June 2, 8 P.M. ET)

Public television's investigative series *Frontline* travels back to China three years after the government crackdown on the student democracy movement and finds a society in uneasy flux. Understandably concerned with the dismantling of the Soviet Union, China's hard-line Communist leadership, which filmmaker Irv Drasnin refers to as a "gerontocracy," still ruthlessly controls politics and the media. But it is woefully out of touch with the younger generations (and two-thirds of China's increasingly urbanized population is under 35), who are moving with determination toward free enterprise and greater consumerism.

Cameras were not allowed on any university campus, but we do see such radical developments as rock-and-roll bands and a fashion-modeling school crowded with young women learning runway technique. The documentary presents a revealing look at a volatile country. Grade: B+

3. NOTHING OUTLASTS THE ENERGIZER.

SECOND THAT EMOTION: NBC renewed the poignant newcomer *I'll Fly Away*

drama, **The Round Table** *(Fridays, 9 p.m.)*, will follow a young FBI agent, a naive Secret Service man, a novice prosecutor, and their friends in Washington, D.C. The makers of *Top Cops* will create **Secret Service** *(Sundays, 7 p.m.)*, a drama-reality hybrid based on actual cases. And after a successful tryout this spring, the doom-and-disaster hour **I Witness Video** *(Sundays, 8 p.m.)*, will try to woo video voyeurs from *America's Funniest.* ◆ **WHAT'S DIFFERENT:** Viewers will have to get used to new time slots for half a dozen series. *Law & Order* moves to Wednesdays at 10, *A Different World* inherits Cosby's Thursdays-at-8 slot, and *The Powers That Be* will air Fridays at 8:30. *I'll Fly Away* moves to Fridays at 10, the better to pursue adult plot lines, while *Quantum Leap* will try to attract younger viewers on Tuesdays at 8. And pity poor *Reasonable Doubts*, whose new home, Tuesdays at 9, puts it opposite *Roseanne.* ◆ **WHAT'S GONE:** In a flurry of housecleaning, NBC has dust-binned *The Adventures of Mark & Brian, Pacific Station, Nightmare Cafe, Dear John, Walter and Emily,* and *Eerie, Indiana. Hot Country Nights* may become a series of specials, and *Mann and Machine* and *The Torkelsons* may get another chance as well, although nothing has been signed. ◆

THE WEEK

All reviews are by ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY *TV critic* **KEN TUCKER.** *Capsules are by Benjamin Svetkey. All times are Eastern standard and are subject to change.*

29 FRIDAY

THE SECRET WORLD OF BATS *(CBS, 8–9 p.m.)* Everything you always wanted to know about the flying mammals—their mating habits, dietary patterns, sleeping arrangements—but were too terrified to ask. Stacy Keach narrates.

30 SATURDAY

JULIE *(ABC, 8:30–9 p.m.)* This new sitcom has an amusing premise: Julie Andrews plays Julie Carlyle, a famous actress and singer. Carlyle hosts a successful New York–based TV variety show, but she has decided to move to Sioux City, Iowa. Why? Because that's where the man of her dreams lives—a nice veterinarian played by TV veteran James Farentino. Carlyle and Dr. Sam McGuire get married in this pilot episode.

Carlyle's TV contract requires her to continue her weekly show, which means that part of each edition of *Julie* concerns the efforts of this major star to put on a network variety series in a city not famous for its concentration of big-name entertainers. The rest of the time, *Julie* follows Julie's comic efforts to adjust to her new Midwestern life with her new husband and her new stepchildren—two adolescent youths from Sam's previous marriage (Rider Strong and Hayley Tyrie).

With a talent as versatile as Andrews' behind it, *Julie* might have been fun; instead, it's a clichéd show that reduces its star to a standard-issue sitcom stepmom. The kids are wisecracking brats; Farentino's character is warm, fuzzy (he's grown a trim little beard), and dull. The subplot about her Sioux City TV show surrounds Andrews with supposedly colorful characters that are actually just dull rip-offs. (Kevin Scannell, for example, plays a local-newsman-turned-talk-show-announcer who is just another variation on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*'s Ted Baxter.)

One of the executive producers of *Julie* is Andrews' husband, film director Blake Edwards. To launch the series, Edwards directed this first episode, but it's a measure of *Julie*'s triteness that not a nanosecond of the slapsticky wit that characterized Edwards films like *The Pink Panther* and *10* is evident here. Andrews is charming, but *Julie* is a drag. **C–**

31 SUNDAY

THE 46TH ANNUAL TONY AWARDS *(CBS, 9–11 p.m.)* Glenn Close is host for the Oscars of Broadway, honoring the year's best shows. Appearances by Danny Glover, Sigourney Weaver, and Carol Channing.

2 TUESDAY

FRONTLINE: CHINA AFTER TIANANMEN *(PBS, 8–9:30 p.m.)* Veteran TV producer Irv Drasnin, who used to make solid news documentaries for CBS (*Misunderstanding China*) in the days when the commercial networks valued solid news, oversees this fascinating *Frontline* about the social and political aftermath of the 1989 massacre in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. PBS says that Drasnin's *Frontline* crew is the first U.S. film team to be granted widespread access since the event, and Drasnin makes the most of it, finding both barely suppressed dissidence and flagrant cultural revolution.

Whether he's bringing his cameras into a recently opened modeling school—China's first—where women learn slinky runway moves to the beat of Michael Jackson, or interviewing Beijing University students who cite Beethoven and Michael Jordan as their heroes, Drasnin demonstrates that there is, as he puts it in his narration, "a credibility gap between what people are told and what they think and do." While the government's brutal put-down of 1989's democratic movement forced citizens to continue parroting the party line of socialism-and-Marxism-forever, according to this documentary, it's clear that what Chinese officials contemptuously refer to here as "bourgeois liberalism" is flourishing.

As an old-school journalist, Drasnin refrains from drawing an obvious conclusion—that China is an example of a nation transformed, made better, by American pop culture. The real message behind the engrossing footage of *China After Tiananmen* is that Jackson and Madonna have probably done more to persuade young Chinese people of the virtues of capitalism than any revolutionary theorist or American statesman. **A–**

LEN HERGEL

SIOUX ME: Andrews entertains a *Julie* guest

LEGACY

The Wunnerful World of Welk

ANYONE WHO considers Right Said Fred the height of pop-music perversity never encountered Lawrence Welk, who died of pneumonia on May 17 at the age of 89. Imagine the scene: It's the mid-'70s and the country is awash in Watergate, androgynous glitter-rock, and militant TV series like *S.W.A.T.* Yet once a week, *The Lawrence Welk Show* presents clean-cut couples wearing straw hats and singing "Sweet Adeline" and an orchestra—complete with accordionists—playing polite "champagne music." Welk didn't care what was happening outside his studio; in his mind, America was still one big, wholesome, patriotic backyard sing-along. To folks who made his show a hit and continued watching long after ABC canceled it in '71 (it went into syndication thereafter), Welk was a welcome reminder of old-fashioned values. To their grandchildren, he was an outright surrealist.

PHOTOFEST

WAVY GRAVY: TV's maestro earned millions

It was easy for kids and hipsters to chuckle at Welk's puritanical show, his trademark accent, his cornball "an' ah-one, an' ah-two" song introductions. The jibes continued even after he retired in 1989. In 1990, Congress approved a $500,000 grant to turn his childhood home in Strasburg, N.D., into a museum to foster tourism—then rescinded the grant following complaints of pork-barrel profligacy. Yet Welk's business world was no laughing matter: His empire included copyright ownership of 20,000 songs (including all of Jerome Kern's) and a retirement complex near San Diego. Within this world, Welk made time stand still. To him, it was forever the Eisenhower years, and everybody loved to polka and waltz with that special guy or gal—and Welk convinced a huge TV audience to feel the same way. Now *that's* perverse. —*David Browne*

3 WEDNESDAY

MOVIE: THE SECRET PASSION OF ROBERT CLAYTON *(USA, 9–11 p.m.)* Former *Family Ties* hunk Scott Valentine plays Robert Clayton Jr., a lawyer who leaves a great career in New York to return to his hometown in Georgia. Why? "I'm tired of too much 'system' and not enough justice," he says sullenly; Valentine says *everything* sullenly in this drably bad TV movie. He takes a job as the local district attorney, even though he knows this will regularly pit him against his father, a local attorney played by *The Human Factor*'s John Mahoney. Clayton, you see, hates his dad. Why? "You sent me to boarding school when I was *seven!*" he says sullenly to his perplexed parent. The way Valentine delivers the line, you can't tell whether it was the school or his tender age that hurt him so; either way, it seems like a pretty skimpy grudge.

Speaking of skimpy, Eve Gordon (*The Powers That Be*) shows up wearing dresses as small and tight as possible (Gordon is rapidly becoming the most talented actress to go sex bomb since Beverly D'Angelo). Alas, there's nothing for Gordon to do here except act coquettish as she conducts affairs with both father and son. The main plot has something to do with Gordon's husband (*Tour of Duty*'s Kevin Conroy) being accused of murdering a stripper (Valentine prosecutes him; Mahoney defends him). But this turgid movie, directed by E.W. Swackhamer (USA's *Are You Lonesome Tonight*), concentrates on the most banal questions about the psychic wounds that bad parenting inflicts. **D**

4 THURSDAY

THE YEAR OF THE GENERALS *(CBS, 9–11 p.m.)* Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf and Charles Kuralt observe the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Midway with rare newsreel footage and interviews with survivors.

LEGAL AFFAIR: *Passion*'s Valentine, Gordon

THIS WEEK'S PICKS

Changing China

FRONTLINE *Tuesday at 8 on PBS*
Right: Three years after the brutal suppression of the student pro-democracy movement in Tiananmen Square, in early June 1989, China-watcher Irv Drasnin returned to find out what is happening there. His report, based on five weeks of filming, found a nation in ferment as China's aging leadership squares off with its youth — three-quarters of the population is less than 35. "There is a growing gap between rhetoric and reality," he says in narration.
The country's leaders are still schooled in Marxist orthodoxy, the state still dominates intellectual life, and internal security appears to be increasing. "For now, there is stability and the party line," says Dranin, but adds: "No longer is China of one mind or vision."
At Beijing's most prestigious high school, students say they hope to visit or study in the United States. One mentions his two heroes: Chou En-Lai and NBA player Michael Jordan. Another, admiring the writer, calls himself "Kafka." A clerk in a store featuring Michael Jackson posters and "Terminator" books says all the Madonna items are sold out.
Drasnin filmed the nation's first school for fashion models and talked to its 28-year-old owner ("the entrepreneurial spirit is everywhere"); a modern dance company, and a training session for Avon cosmetics saleswomen. At private shops, employees work harder but earn double the salaries at state stores. "Increasingly, it's income, not idealogy, that counts," he concludes.
He also filmed rock groups not allowed to appear in concert or on state-controlled television, and found that filmmakers whose work was seen before the 1989 protest have left the country, work for the state or no longer work at all. "There are limits of free expression, but also on the state's ability to suppress it," says Drasnin.
A Chinese Baptist minister sees growing interest in Christianity, but the country also faces increasing crime and drug problems and has 100 million jobless.
Drasnin's was the first American film team allowed to travel widely inside the country since the Tiananmen Square demonstration of discontent (the leaders called it "a conspiracy of counterrevolutionaries"), which was silenced with tanks and guns. "China doesn't change easily," he says.

AROUND TOWN *Thursday at 8:30 on 26*
Robert Aubry Davis, host of WETA's weekly arts review series, spends this installment talking with J. Carter Brown, retiring director of the National Gallery of Art. Brown, who became director in 1969, is only the third person to hold that post in the gallery's history. The interview was taped May 14.

THE YEAR OF THE GENERALS
Thursday at 9 on CBS
CBS News' Charles Kuralt and H. Norman Schwarzkopf, who commanded Allied Forces in the Persian Gulf war, team up for the second in a series of CBS News World War II 50th Anniversary specials. This one, airing 50 years to the date after the Battle of Midway, chronicles the personal stories of the men who changed the course of history in 1942. Among them are American military heroes Dwight Eisenhower, Douglas MacArthur, George Patton, Chester Nimitz and George C. Marshall, plus British Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery, and the German "Desert Fox," Gen. Erwin Rommel.
Using historical footage, memoirs and interviews with World War II survivors and family members, the special looks at Allied leaders who clashed among themselves but united against a common enemy.
Historians view 1942 as the pivotal year of the war, when the tide turned away from Germany and Japan and to the Allies. The special tells the story of that year's the key battles, including Midway in the the Pacific and Operation Torch, the first landing of American troops in North Africa.
Off-camera readings of historical letters and memoirs are voiced by Matthew Broderick, James Garner, Mel Gibson, Charlton Heston, Anthony Hopkins, Robert Mitchum, Christopher Plummer and Rod Steiger.

ROSEBUD AWARDS *Saturday at 9 on 26*
WETA showcases 15 winners and nominees for 1992 Rosebud Awards. Ranging from 3 to 28 minutes, the locally-produced projects include music videos, animations, documentary and narrative shorts and art/experimental films.

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COVER PHOTO: NBC photo by Al Levine

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Chicago Tribune, Tuesday, June 2, 1992

'Frontline' in China

3 years after protests, the government goes one way, the people another

By Rick Kogan
TV critic

TV review

There are many amazing sights and sounds in "China After Tiananmen," a "Frontline" presentation airing at 8 p.m. Tuesday on PBS-Ch. 11. There are women wearing miniskirts, rock clubs, a street-corner Mao museum, and, in a sentence from a high school student that goes to the heart of the socio-political moment, "In my heart there are two heroes. One is Chou En-lai. And the other is in the NBA . . . Michael Jordan."

The portrait of today's China painted by producer-reporter Irv Drasnin in this 90-minute program is colorful and captivating. His was the first American film crew allowed to travel widely through the country since the Tiananmen protests in 1989, and he takes advantage of that opportunity.

Though accompanied by official government guides, Drasnin and his crew train their cameras on a vast cross section of the huge populace and get from many of them surprising, provocative and instructive statements.

One party official sounds ominous when saying: "When we open the window of reform, some flies and mosquitoes may come in. When they do, we'll control them. We'll kill the flies and mosquitoes. We can resist the invasion of decadent influences like bourgeois ideas and lifestyles."

But can they?

Drasnin finds example after example of flourishing capitalism, from thousands of young women being taught the secrets of selling Avon cosmetics to the country's first modeling school.

It's little wonder that the economic possibilities in China make foreign companies salivate ("They hold an often-elusive hope of the China market, to sell just one of anything to 1 billion Chinese," Drasnin says) and have turned many Chinese into entrepreneurs.

"Payment and earning power," Drasnin says. "That's what most Chinese are thinking about."

This is a fascinating program, coming on the third anniversary of the student pro-democracy demonstrations in Tiananmen Square. What the June 4, 1989, crackdown may have accomplished on the surface ("Communism will inevitably triumph," says one hard-liner. "And it will triumph throughout the world. History will bear this out. No question about it") hides a nation in upheaval.

One of the most interesting aspects is that many parts of the "state apparatus"—the military, the Communist Party, the security forces—are investing in businesses for themselves, creating a weird system.

"This is called Cadre Capitalism. . . . There's no way of knowing where the money goes," Drasnin says. "But it's every bureaucracy for itself."

Like the veteran producer he is, Drasnin doesn't do a lot of pontificating. For the most part, he lets the story tell itself, punctuating the tale only to make informed comments.

"Today in China, there's a credibility gap, between a government moving in one direction and people moving in another—between what people are told and what they think," Drasnin says. "China has come to a crossroads, with no one path leading to the future."

Whatever paths are chosen, the world will feel the footsteps.

Pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square in June 198
Three years later, pockets of capitalism flourish in China.

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES, TUESDAY, JUNE 2, 1992

WATCH IT! /Warnings & Recommendations

CHINA NOW: On June 4, 1989, the world watched as members of the Chinese army shot down their own people during a bold mass demonstration in Tiananmen Square. Three years later, reporter and producer Irv Drasnin is back with a PBS "Frontline" documentary that examines the current state of the last great communist hold-out.

Drasnin, who has reported on China for CBS and for "Frontline," finds in "China After Tiananmen" that the country is in the midst of a profound identity crisis. Although the government has mounted surveillance cameras in Tiananmen Square and continues to be politically repressive, it is also encouraging—tacitly and sometimes explicitly—capitalist economic policies.

Although Drasnin is a thoughtful China observer, "China After Tiananmen" has a muffled, enigmatic quality. Drasnin was prevented from visiting any university campuses, and he was almost always accompanied by party officials. As he points out, many of the people he interviews are unable to say what they really think, so their comments tend to sound like strange bureaucratic riddles. The documentary, an hour and a half long, airs at 8 tonight. Rating: ★ ★ ★.

"China After Tiananmen" will be followed by a special "Dear Frontline" presentation, which examines reaction to some of the controversial broadcasts of the last season. The program, airing at 9:30 p.m. on Channel 11, features viewer letters, responses from some of the subjects of "Frontline" documentaries and updates on several previous documentaries, including "Who Killed Adam Mann?" "The War We Left Behind" and "Who Cares About Children."

NOT AMATEUR HOUR: Chicagoan Mike Kochevar and his "loud visual alternative pop" band Jak Makral will be one of the undiscovered professional musicians getting a shot at national exposure tonight on ABC's "USA Music Challenge." The program airs at 9 tonight on Channel 7.

Host Malcolm Jamal-Warner, assisted by Victoria Jackson ("Saturday Night Live"), David Faustino ("Married . . . With Children"), Jennie Garth ("Beverly Hills 90210") and the rap group Salt-n-Pepa will share the stage with several competing musicians and groups.

The performances will be judged by a panel of music industry executives and journalists, with an MCA recording contract going to the winner.

Ginny Holbert

SF Chronicle

JOHN CARMAN
TELEVISION

'Democracy movement' protesters in China are the subject of tonight's 'Frontline'

'Frontline' Looks At China Today

Chinese troops cleared Tiananmen Square three years ago this week, extinguishing the democracy movement and catapulting the world's most populous nation back to orthodoxy.

The observance is marked by renewed reports of the torture of political prisoners in China and by a 90-minute "Frontline" broadcast tonight about China after the Tiananmen massacre.

Produced and reported by former CBS newsman Irv Drasnin, the "Frontline" special (9 p.m. on Channel 9) suggests that China's aging Communist leaders are playing a game they can't win.

1st U.S. film crew to travel widely after

Drasnin's film crew spent five weeks scouring the breadth of China. It's the first time since the democracy movement was crushed that an American film crew has been allowed to travel widely, if not altogeth-

Tiananmen crackdown

Government escorts tagged along to keep watch.

What Drasnin found, in effect, was that an irresistible force continues to make headway against a seemingly immovable object.

The immovable object is China's Communist Party. It has reasserted its political primacy, stymied dissent and even revived Mao Zedong as an object of national adulation. The party is supposedly guarding against what it regards as "bourgeois liberalization."

One sign of the crackdown is the disappearance of films dramatizing injustices during the Communist era. An official tells Drasnin that "we don't want to make films which cause people to lose confidence in the future or to feel disappointed with the country. Film is supposed to boost morale."

But if a political freeze has fallen on China, economic forces are still pushing against Communist ideology. Chinese leaders haven't quashed economic reforms, especially in the free enterprise zones of southeastern China, near Hong Kong.

They're betting that the people will trade political freedom for material gains. Drasnin seems to conclude that they're missing the point; economic reform will inevitably spur expectations for political change.

While Drasnin notes the surveillance cameras scanning Tiananmen Square and the guards posted at the gates of Beijing University — partly to keep foreigners out — he also finds ample evidence of irrepressible Western influences.

For starters, the Communist belief in central economic planning has waned. The state sector of the economy is in debt and currently accounts for only about half of the national income.

Meanwhile, a Chinese version of Silicon Valley has opened up only 10 miles from Tiananmen Square. Despite official frowns, there is a growing interest in religion. A new consumer-oriented, white-collar class is developing.

Asked if he fretted about "bourgeois liberalization," a Chinese distributor for Avon cosmetics replies, "I don't worry about that, no. All I worry about is sales."

And for what it's worth, a Chinese teenager tells Drasnin that his two heroes are Zhou En-lai, the late pragmatic premier, and "the other is in the NBA — Michael Jordan."

According to Drasnin, there is a growing credibility gap between China's elderly Communist leaders and a population that's drifting away from totalitarianism. The fact that two-thirds of the nation's population is under age 35 probably will accelerate that drift.

Drasnin's report is the best interpretive glimpse of China I've seen since the Tiananmen tragedy. The program could have been trimmed to 60 minutes without damage, but the view it offers is revealing and quite possibly prescient.

"Frontline" also lays claim to the following half-hour of KQED's schedule, starting at 10:30 p.m., for a separate program called "Dear Frontline." It consists of viewer letters, updates and on-camera comments about controversial "Frontline" programs of the past year.